

Where a start-up gets a leg-up



Gary Brownstone [BA/82]

Street names like Research Road and Innovation Drive offer clues about the cluster of buildings on the southwest corner of the University of Manitoba's Fort Garry campus.

This is Smartpark: a place where ideas and the market meet. High-tech tenants like BASF, Monsanto and Cangene have set up shop close to scores of innovative minds whose discoveries might yield the next big thing. Smartpark is built around four industries:

information and communications technology, engineering and advanced materials, health and biotechnology, and agricultural and nutritional sciences.

On this 100-acre plot of land, U of M research gets commercialized and, ideally, the big minds behind the even bigger ideas stay in Manitoba.

But what happens if a researcher doesn't want to peddle their product to a large company? Suppose they get the entrepreneurial bug and want to take their idea from the basement to the boardroom themselves. Rather than miss out on these smaller-scale opportunities, Smartpark created the eureka project, an incubator which helps start-up companies go from cellar to stellar.

The program offers participants professional space (their own turnkey office within its facility at Smartpark), business tools (a computer and Internet-access) and advice (from fellow Smartpark tenants and the project's director) – all at a price that won't sink the ship before it even gets out of harbour. According to eureka project director **Gary Brownstone**, there's good reason for the university to invest in the little guy.

"There's an entrepreneurial renaissance taking place in Manitoba," says Brownstone, who ran an entrepreneurship program at Red River College for five years before joining eureka project prior to its launch in January 2007.

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Literary journal turns the big 4-0

In 1967, people were questioning everything from war to women's rights. Bob Dylan's lyrics rang truer than ever: "The times, they are a-changin'."

The year provided an ideal backdrop for the University of Manitoba to launch Mosaic – a journal of scholarly essays that tackles topics from different perspectives: literary, philosophical, political and psychological. Mosaic turned 40 this year.

During the last four decades, critical thinkers such as John Sallis and Mieke Bal have written for the journal, which is distributed in 34 countries and has subscribers in almost every state and province in North America. Mosaic editor **Dawne McCance** [BSc/65, CertEd/66, MA/80, PhD/84] scours the globe in search of bright minds to contribute or review essays. She believes this international approach underpins Mosaic's success.



Mosaic through the years

"I try to attract the best in the world to Mosaic so it will be a leading journal in what we do," says McCance, currently on leave from the headship of the University of Manitoba's department of religion. "Publish the best and the people will want to read it."

McCance has hosted two international conferences since becoming editor eight years ago, both drawing hundreds of people and the best keynote speakers she could find. "I think this too has been a way of attracting top scholars to Mosaic," she says.

After forty years of publication, Mosaic lines the shelves in more than 500 major university and college libraries but McCance says the journal is still a work in progress.

"Every time you achieve what you might call a milestone then you have to ask yourself the question again: Where do we go from now on?"

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Entrants, who mirror the industries found throughout Smartpark, are accepted with the goal of graduating within three years. (To graduate, they must be financially independent and ready to go to market.)

Brownstone says the biggest challenge facing eureka project – which is a not-for-profit program that relies heavily on public and private funding – is generating results in a short period of time.

“We have to prove that this model of incubation works and will deliver results in Manitoba that our stakeholders are looking for,” he says. “We have to constantly be on the lookout for ongoing funding to keep our program going so we have to show that this program works...to say, ‘Look, this program makes sense.’”

Eureka project business tenant SMT Research, a group of four engineers and U of M grads, created technology that detects and locates moisture in buildings wirelessly. (New building materials tend to be less porous, causing moisture to get trapped and potentially weakening the structure.) SMT installs moisture detection monitors throughout a building. The devices have sensors that feed information to a monitoring centre 24 hours a day. SMT recently worked on the new Manitoba Hydro building in downtown Winnipeg.

“(Getting the job) was a major coup,” Brownstone says. “Just to be a part of that gives them that instant credibility.”

There are 10 companies in eureka project and four on the waiting list. Brownstone has faith in the program’s approach: “I think that the model makes sense...Companies that go through incubators are five times more likely to succeed.”

JEREMY BROOKS [BA/98]

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